

Homily based on the readings from July 27, 2025 (Genesis 18.20-32; Colossians 2.12-14; Luke 11.1-13)

Over the years, I am sure everyone here has had at least a few conversations with people who are not practicing Christians about the nature of our faith. Sometimes these discussions lead to a productive dialogue, but often they wind up hitting a wall. In my experience, one of the most difficult concepts to convey – sometimes even to people who grew up in a Catholic household – is the way we interact with the Lord through prayer. We are always faced with the same set of questions: If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, is it possible to say anything that could change his mind? Could we ever tell God something he does not already know? Do we really *believe* that prayer makes a meaningful impact on the world around us?

The answers to these questions, of course, are *no*, *no*, and *yes*.

Nevertheless, it takes a great deal of time and effort to articulate the Christian perspective with any degree of precision. We all know – in the

depths of our heart – that prayer is the most powerful tool we have for changing the world, but how can we explain this fact to someone who has never experienced it directly? How does prayer actually work? What is its fundamental nature and purpose?

Not surprisingly, these questions have been on the minds of Christians since the earliest days of the Church. As we heard in today's Gospel, the disciples themselves asked Christ to teach them how to pray. His response, as we know, was what we now call the Lord's Prayer. We recite the *text* of this prayer on a daily basis; its *structure* not only provides us with a template for our own *personal* prayers, but also a framework for understanding the *essence* of prayer itself.

For most of us here today, the words of the Lord's Prayer have become so familiar that we risk glossing over their actual meaning. Let us focus for a moment on one particular petition, which we have probably repeated tens of thousands of times: *thy kingdom come*. Here is how Saint Augustine explained this phrase:

And as for our saying: *Your kingdom come*, it will surely come whether we will it or not. But we are stirring up our desires for the kingdom so that it can come to us and we can deserve to reign there.

Likewise, here is his explanation of *thy will be done*:

[W]e are asking him to make us obedient so that his will may be done in us as it is done in heaven by his angels.

In other words, when we pray, we are not asking the Lord to change his mind – we are asking him to change *us*. Similarly, prayer is not a vehicle for sharing information that God does not already possess. To quote Saint Augustine once more:

God does not want to know what we want (for he cannot fail to know it) but wants us rather to exercise our desire through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us.

Not only does prayer allow us to accept God's will in specific situations, but over *time* it revitalizes and refashions our souls – so that, as we progress along the path to holiness, we gradually come to desire precisely the things that *he* desires.

None of this is to say, though, that our prayers have no effect beyond ourselves. There are countless examples of wondrous events that have occurred in the wake of an individual's prayers. In fact, you may have seen the news this past week that Pope Leo formally declared that a miracle took place in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in 2007 – relating to a physician who prayed for an infant who was born without a pulse. Once again, God did not suddenly change his mind about what was going to happen, nor was he unaware of the love the parents had for their baby. Through his *boundless* compassion and his *divine* foreknowledge, God had already granted this request before it was even made – yet still he wanted the doctor to offer his *own* spiritual sacrifice on behalf of the child. Even though God has the *power* to make all the pain and

suffering in the universe vanish in an *instant*, part of his marvelous design is that *all* of us, his beloved sons and daughters, are called to serve as *coworkers* in his mercy – through our words, through our actions, but most of all through our *prayers*.

There is one additional aspect of prayer that is not explicitly addressed in today's readings, but which is essential to our understanding: Christ's *remarkable* command that we pray for the people who wish to do us harm. Jesus demonstrated this behavior himself, as he prayed for his murderers while he was dying on the Cross. Countless saints and martyrs over the centuries – from Saint Stephen to Saint John Paul II – have followed his example. One consequence of these prayers *may* be that God softens the hearts of our enemies, but what he is *truly* seeking is for each of us to conform our *own* heart to his most Sacred Heart. In the *end*, the purpose of prayer is to unite ourselves with God – to love him and to love *like* him. If everyone in the world – every single child of God – would fully commit himself to this simple but profound task, the impact would be beyond all telling.